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Wednesday, November 14, 1962

5:45 to 6:02 P.M. approx.

At 11 A.M. on Tuesday, November 13, the ExComm met without the President in George Ball's office in the State Department. Not one of the official numbered ExComm meetings, the purpose of the meeting was to discuss the IL-28s in light of intelligence information received in the previous 24 hours.¹ The group discussed ways to increase the pressure on the Soviets and Cubans to remove the IL-28s, and John McCone presented a memorandum on the long-term outlook for Cuba in which he argued that the minimum inspection requirement was a combination of aerial surveillance and unfettered ground inspection. He also argued that Castro remained "over-equipped" with ground forces which gave him the capability of supporting insurgency movements throughout Latin America.

At 3:30 P.M. on Wednesday, November 14, Robert Kennedy met with Soviet Ambassador Anatoly Dobrynin. Dobrynin delivered a message from Khrushchev to President Kennedy on Cuba.² Khrushchev said that he agreed to remove the IL-28s, but that he would need two to three months, not the 30 days offered by Kennedy. Khrushchev went on to say that the Soviet Union had fulfilled its part of the agreement and yet the United States had not yet lifted the quarantine, stopped its surveillance flights, or formally pledged not to invade Cuba. Recalling the test ban negotiations that had been going on for many months previously, Khrushchev proposed that U.N. inspection posts be established throughout the Caribbean region, including Cuba and Florida, to monitor air-fields, major sea-ports, railway junctions, and highways.

At 4:35 P.M. that same afternoon, George Ball called McGeorge Bundy to let him know of Khrushchev's letter, characterizing it as "not too encouraging. It keeps it wrapped up." In turn, Bundy told Ball that the President wanted Ball and Llewellyn Thompson to come to the White House to discuss the message with the President and Dean Rusk.

At 4:30 P.M. the President and Dean Rusk met with West German Chancellor Konrad Adenauer.³ While that meeting took place in the Oval Office, Bundy, Ball, and

¹ For John McCone's summary of the meeting, see *FRUS*, 11:443-44.

² *FRUS*, 11:451-54.

³ For the official summary of the meeting, see *FRUS*, 15:433-43.

Thompson met downstairs at the White House, presumably in Bundy's office, to discuss Khrushchev's letter. The President's meeting with Adenauer finished at 5:45 P.M., at which time, Bundy, Ball, and Thompson joined the President and Rusk in the Oval Office. McNamara and Theodore Sorensen, neither of whom were listed as present at the meeting with Adenauer but who may have taken part in the meeting in Bundy's office, also joined the group in the Oval Office.

Off-the-Record Oval Office Conversation on Cuba⁴

Llewellyn Thompson: [00:35] [*Unclear*] Castro, with the Cubans.

President Kennedy: Yeah.

Thompson: [*Unclear*] twice, which would indicate that they expect to be dealing with the government of Cuba without Castro.

President Kennedy: That would be an improvement [*unclear*].

Unidentified: [*Unclear*] Cubans.

President Kennedy: Well, the only problem is that he seems to be putting in here . . . I think that we could probably go to . . . [*unclear*] obviously worked out a time schedule on the IL-28s, but we obviously wants someone to . . . We're either we're going to . . . this U.N. post . . . and not have overflights [*unclear*].

Dean Rusk: Mr. President, I don't know how far you got in your talks downstairs about how we might approach this. I had some thoughts on [*unclear*].

McGeorge Bundy: We got quite a distance, but I don't know whether we all agree.

President Kennedy: Is Bobby [Kennedy] gone, or is he . . . ?

Bundy: Bobby was prepared to come back. He had things he had to get out before—

Rusk: Well, it seems to me that we ought go back, perhaps with a written statement, even though we'd make it an oral communication in theory, rather than a letter, and that we make the point that it seems to us that Castro is standing in the way of the solution between the two of us. And that we shouldn't let Castro frustrate an agreement between the Soviet Union and the United States. The Soviets have strong means of pressure on him, and so do we, and that between the two of us we ought to be

⁴ Including President Kennedy, George Ball, McGeorge Bundy, Dean Rusk, Robert McNamara, Theodore Sorensen, and Llewellyn Thompson. Tape 58, John F. Kennedy Library, President's Office Files, Presidential Recordings Collection.

able to ensure that what we've agreed to can be made effective as far as Cuba's concerned.

And secondly, it seems to me we ought to review this point of performance and non-performance.

Rusk: He keeps making the point they've performed but we haven't. Well, now, the ledger on that is pretty good from our point of view. We can show a limited performance on his side and some pretty definite performance on our side to try to ease the situation. We've got to catalogue that, as to what has been and has not been done. We've got to call his attention to some concessions made by the United States. First, the suspension of the quarantine in practice for the past ten days—or whenever the exact period was—and our agreement to lift the blockade at once on the basis of Soviet assurance about the removal of the bombers in 30 days, which is an attempt to make things easy for him to get this thing wound up.

[03:01] As far as safeguards are concerned, there are two kinds of safeguards [that] are needed here. One in the short term related to Cuba, those [safeguards] specifically mentioned in his October 28 speech. Now, we've tried several efforts here, but three times they've turned down suggestions that came up through U Thant: the Red Cross, the Latin American embassies, and a combination of neutral embassies to do the job that Khrushchev said would be done in the [unclear].

Bundy: [03:35] Has that third one been turned down?

Rusk: I think it has, but we'll actually check that particular point. The count on the missiles that actually have left—while it helps and we appreciate the cooperation that we can get from them on that point—but that's incomplete, because it does not provide a full basis for assurance to our people of the Western hemisphere on that point.

In the long term we think there is promise and a reciprocal kind of safeguard that can be worked out under the atom-free arrangements, and those can be brought into operation in two or three months under [unclear].

Ball: Don't you want to say that the idea of reciprocity is one that was not in the deal, but . . .

Rusk: In the short term.

Ball: Well, I think we [unclear]—

Rusk: [Unclear.]

Ball: But we might be willing to entertain it in the context of an atom-free arrangement.

Bundy: Well, do you need to put it in the atom-free context? There's a different context which is assurances respecting all the parties to the deal. One of the things that came up downstairs, Mr. President, was if we are going to get the U.S. into a reciprocal bargain, we'd probably better get the Soviet Union—

President Kennedy: Well then I agree. I don't think we can have U.N. people going into Cuba and the U.S. . . . They would argue that if you're going to let them go all over Cuba you've got to let them go all over Florida.

Bundy: Well, George [Ball] made the quite amusing and I think helpful suggestion, at least for bargaining, that it's just as sensible to inspect the ports where they load for Cuba, in the Soviet Union, where these missiles came from, as it is to inspect Florida.

President Kennedy: [05:03] We've got the problem of whether . . . It seems to me the overflights, the U-2 flights, we're just going to continue those no matter what we've got underneath, I think, unless—because there's no inspection we're probably going to get that would be satisfactory. I think we probably ought to drop that out of the conversation. We shouldn't say anymore about it and just go ahead and plan the high flights after this immediate period and not get into a conversation about our right to do so. Would that be your judgment, Tommy, or do you think—just do it. Then if they shoot one down then . . . Or do you think we ought to tell them we're going to do it?

Thompson: I think at least for this present period, where he's pressing, that you have to do this before he takes the [IL-]28s out. But you have to respond to that and say this is [unclear].

Bundy: You don't have to discuss what it is; you just have to say, "Our own means are all we have."

Thompson: We have to take steps. That's right.

President Kennedy: [05:48] O.K. Well, then we would come back [unclear]. . . I think that . . . Of course, we're going to have to settle this quarantine question. I think that with—this is just an [unclear] first opinion—that cranking on the quarantine to get the IL-28s out is not a particularly satisfactory device.

Bundy: There are two people to whom it's wholly unsatisfactory, Mr. President. They are you and the Chairman.

President Kennedy: That's right.

Bundy: The question is how far do we want to go? [laughing]

President Kennedy: I [unclear]—that's right, how far. But I . . . maybe—you don't know what his situation is—

Bundy: Bobby said that he felt Dobrynin⁵ was most unattracted by the notion of going back to the quarantine. Bobby made some noises of that sort. [*Unclear*.]

President Kennedy: [06:24] He thinks—it's just really a question then whether we ought to . . .

Bundy: Well, at least the general feeling was that we ought to do a letter, very much along the lines that the Secretary has just outlined. No essential point of what we reached downstairs was left out in his view, I think.

Rusk: But we'll also put in a paragraph about the assurances on invasion.

Bundy: That's right.

Rusk: Make it clear we're not welching on that.

Bundy: "They'll exist. We're not welching on those." But that then, not as a message from you to Khrushchev, but as a message from Bobby to Dobrynin, add in that this is just about the last time. Bobby's said he's already said to him, "The President's about the only man who isn't ready to act on these IL-28s."⁶ And carry it back that this is really a very generous offer, and unless we can get this assurance, well, we'll find ourselves back on the same track that gave us so much trouble before.

I don't, myself, think you can avoid being ready to move in some energetic way and having him believe you *and* get the IL-28s out. I just don't think he lives that way.

President Kennedy: [07:24] Well, I think you've got—the alternative would be to get the missiles out and the quarantine lifted. That we're going to maintain close surveillance and that our invasion commitment is, and any other commitments, are . . . we're not going to give those commitments until he gets the IL-28s out. Then we continue our flyover. When they shoot at them, then we shoot back, and he gets the kind of escalation which he can't like very much because it's . . . And, in addition, everything else, any other negotiations which he may want to go on, on Berlin or anything else, are held up because [of] our public charge that he did not fulfill his agreement, and we'd be able to . . .

Well, that would be one course. We'd be out of our invasion guarantee and we'd continue our overflights, and we would not have to bring on the direct encounter again.

Theodore Sorensen: That, of course, in effect is simply sitting tight, not making any new offers or proposals and pursuing [*unclear*].

⁵ Anatoly Dobrynin was the Soviet ambassador to the United States.

⁶ The implicit threat in this statement is U.S. military strikes against the IL-28s.

President Kennedy: [08:25] Well, this would be a week from now. I think we ought to negotiate, see what we can get out of it. But I would think that at the end of the road we're going to have to decide whether we go with the quarantine route on the bombers or whether—

Bundy: Well, it would be dangerous for us to say too much about what we're going to do if we're not going to do it. I think that would undermine something of what we've gained in terms of what he thinks about us in the last month or so.

President Kennedy: Well, I don't think it's possible for Bobby to go back and say—the only thing is, I'm not sure that the only alternative we've got is the quarantine *at this point*. I think we could—

Bundy: That's correct.

President Kennedy: All they have to do is shoot at us a few times, and we could put the quarantine back if the bombers . . .

Bundy: Yeah. We've thought of—the argument yesterday,⁷ and I think most of this came out this way with respect to the overflight technique, is that if you apply that for the purpose of getting shot at you get into a situation that is really less attractive to us at present. That that involves shooting, and it will lead to reciprocal battle. And you're going to be very rapidly, given the way the Air Force will put the heat on—this is where we were Saturday [October] 27; we were about to have an air war. It's a lot easier for Admiral McNamara to control the quarantine than it is for General McNamara to control the Air Force, in one sense.

Robert McNamara: [09:41] But I think we, nonetheless, could take the President's position now.

Bundy: Oh, I don't think we have to commit now.

McNamara: In the [unclear], I really don't think we have to [unclear]—

Bundy: No, I—

McNamara: [Unclear] choose the course.

Rusk: We can get in a little bit of this in that if we use the idea that I suggested at the beginning. Remind him that they have strong means of pressure on Castro and so do we. And that—

⁷ Bundy is presumably referring to the *de facto* ExComm meeting held in Ball's office the previous morning.

President Kennedy: What do we think about this U.N. business? He's made a proposal that they'll agree to the U.N. inspection of Cuba if other countries plus Florida are thrown in. Now, what's our answer to that?

Sorensen: I think our answer is . . .

Bundy: George's bargain.⁸

Sorensen: The other idea . . . I've worded it, because we're having difficulty how to express it, this way: "If you wish, as your letter indicates, to *add* to this mutual agreement"—because it wasn't in the original agreement—"new undertakings with respect to reciprocal inspection arrangements, we would be prepared to enlarge the discussions to include this possibility, provided the inspection arrangements were truly reciprocal and applied to the ports of all the principal parties, including the Soviet Union as well as the United States."

President Kennedy: Of course, we can get into another long exchange of letters, which we've been doing now [*unclear*]—

Bundy: Well, what we do here is not to say [*unclear*]—

President Kennedy: I know there are a lot of arguments, but I wonder if we ought to—

Bundy: [10:52] But he [*unclear*] us off that hook and then said "Please instruct your people to negotiate on this."⁹

President Kennedy: Yeah.

Bundy: And I think we can say—he knows, surely, as we know, that inspection agreements are the hardest thing in the—he knows better than anybody how hard they are to bring along.

President Kennedy: Well now, do you think we ought to do this by letter to him or do you think we ought to just get John McCloy [to] talk to Kuznetsov? It sounded to me like he wanted it to go up there, didn't he?

Thompson: [11:14] I think you've got to nail some things, because this is—

Bundy: You've got two letters here from him, now, and I think—

⁸ Bundy is referring to George Ball's suggestion that Soviet ports be added to the list of inspection sites.

⁹ In his message, Khrushchev had said: "If you would give your representatives—McCloy, Stevenson and others—appropriate instructions on the question of U.N. posts in the Caribbean region and adjoining regions of the U.S.—and our representatives have such instructions—and if they would come to an agreement then all this could be made public." *FRUS*, 11:453.

Thompson: And in both of them he said he's fulfilled his commitments. I think you've got to tell him that he hasn't.

Bundy: He said the same thing to [Frank] Roberts.¹⁰

Thompson: Yeah.

President Kennedy: All right. Well, let's say we write and tell him why he hasn't fulfilled them and all the rest, and whatever you think is appropriate, and then we send John McCloy some instructions to get Kuznetsov in and just see if we can get out of this. At the end of the road, we can then make our judgment of whether we go back to quarantine or whether we announce that he hasn't met his commitments and therefore while we will suspend—while the quarantine will not be the weapon, we will . . .

That's why we've got to move with some speed, because that quarantine is unraveling so fast and becoming . . . maybe it's [unclear]—

Bundy: I'm not sure it's unraveling that fast, Mr. President.

President Kennedy: [11:59] Well, maybe that's a way to let it sort of dissolve and get out of our invasion commitment and continue our overflights as our sanction.

McNamara: Well, we have four to six days here, at least.

Unidentified: Yeah.

Bundy: Well, I think that really turns on—it's certainly not that—the military situation is not significantly affected by the presence of the IL-28s. And there is some reason to believe that we can get Khrushchev to say flatly to us what he appears to have said to Roberts, that there are no warheads, no nuclear weapons left in Cuba.¹¹ That's the important thing, to get this.

President Kennedy: He says he *can* get these out in two or three months [unclear].

Bundy: [Unclear] he can get them out in less time than that.

Rusk: He can get them out faster than [unclear].

¹⁰ Bundy is referring to a meeting that took place two days earlier between Khrushchev and Sir Frank Roberts, the British ambassador to the Soviet Union. Before leaving his post to return to London, Roberts was granted an extended farewell interview with Khrushchev on November 12. Amongst the statements Khrushchev made at the meeting were that all nuclear warheads had been removed from Cuba and that the Soviets had fulfilled all of their obligations agreed to on 27 and 28 October. Roberts's summary of the meeting is in Public Record Office (PRO), PREM 11/3996, 83827.

¹¹ Ibid. Khrushchev had, in fact, made such a statement twice in his letter to President Kennedy. *FRUS*, 11:452-53.

President Kennedy: That's right, but I—But he says it can be done: "As I already said, I can assure [the President] that those planes will be removed."¹² I mean, he can assure me. That doesn't mean he's assuring me.

Bundy: Yeah.

President Kennedy: But he can assure me. And he can get to it in two or three months. But he'll only do it if we lift the quarantine, [agree to] a mutual commitment, have our planes stop flying over.

Rusk: You see, one thing he's probably trying to do here is to save his relations with Castro if he can.

Unidentified: Or the other Cubans.

Rusk: Or the other Cubans. But that doesn't mean that he isn't prepared to break with these Cubans if he has to avoid a hotting up of this situation.

President Kennedy: Do you think we ought to say to him at some point—well, this is for the future—about what our surveillance will be high level. We're going to have to continue it. Then say—

Bundy: That's the sort of thing I'd put on McCloy to Kuznetzov.

Seven seconds excised as classified information.

President Kennedy: [13:37] Who's going to take charge?

Bundy: We'll have a draft for you in the morning. Then I think the [State] Department will draw the draft. And . . .

[Bundy, Sorensen, and Rusk have a short, background conversation about who is to prepare the draft.]

McNamara: Mr. President, about tomorrow's surveillance—

President Kennedy: Yeah.

McNamara: Low-level. Under the circumstances should we fly or not? I'd be inclined to fly.

President Kennedy: Yeah, I thought tomorrow we might [*unclear*].

McNamara: Six sorties tomorrow.

¹² FRUS, 11:452.

Rusk: Did we get any reaction on the U-2s today?

McNamara: No, no reaction today. So I'd be inclined to fly high-level and low-level tomorrow. Three low-level paths with two planes each. A total of six [sorties].

Rusk: Include the bombers in at least one of those [unclear]?

McNamara: Yes. Both bomber airfields would be included.

Bundy: [14:14] Our notion would be to leave out of the draft the notion that time is short and that this whole thing is going to unravel. The President will have to consider what he does next, but you don't have to say what it's going to be.

President Kennedy: I think Bobby—can't Bobby put that in an oral message?

Bundy: Yeah.

President Kennedy: Just say, "Now—"

Thompson: This would all be oral message, isn't it?

Unidentified: [Unclear] in writing [unclear].

Bundy: It would be in writing. And we hand over the written part. This is an oral message from him, too.

President Kennedy: Yeah. So we hand over the written [message] but then Bobby gives it in his own way a sense of immediacy.¹³

Bundy: Yeah. Bobby's notion is there's only one peace-lover in the [U.S.] Government and he's entirely surrounded by militarists, and it's not a bad image. That's why this stuff comes back on the election.

President Kennedy: [Unclear] start talking about the election is—

Bundy: [laughing] Well, Bobby's feeding him that stuff, Mr. President. [Unclear] Attorney General [unclear].

President Kennedy: Yeah, but he thinks this is a victory for peace, this election¹⁴, rather than—he doesn't [unclear].

¹³ For the text of the message as it was delivered, see *FRUS*, 11:460-62.

¹⁴ In his letter of 14 November 1962, Khrushchev had commented on the defeat of Richard Nixon in the California gubernatorial election. Khrushchev had said: "It is significant that as a result of the elections precisely those candidates were defeated who, if I may use such an expression, were making most frenzied bellicose speeches." *FRUS*, 11:453-54.

Bundy: [*Unclear*] if you want to give him some argument on that? Bobby ought to give some argument on that.

President Kennedy: Well, we can explain it to Dobrynin? Say, “Yeah [*unclear*]”—

Bundy: Bobby said Dobrynin said he understood it perfectly.

Ball: One thing that—

President Kennedy: Dobrynin said he did?

Bundy: He understood the strength of the feeling on the IL-28s.

Ball: Yeah, he did say that. And obviously, I think he must be reporting back what the press is doing on the IL-28s.

President Kennedy: [15:19] I think that Bobby ought to say this is getting be [*unclear*]—I mean sooner or later [*unclear*] we’re all going to be coming to the end of our negotiations. “You’re not going to get them out. You’re going to have to wait until U.N. observers are set up in the Soviet Union and Florida and Cuba.”

Bundy: We’ve already given him the concession—well, this will be in the letter—that [*unclear*] the quarantine before this, which we said wasn’t in the [*unclear*].

President Kennedy: [15:37] The fact is that for a tacit agreement that we can fly U-2s over Cuba, plus getting IL-28s, he can get a commitment on the no-invasion and a lifting of the quarantine. He hasn’t got either one of those today, so he’s got to—

Bundy: But he’s got to give us some on-site inspection.

President Kennedy: What?

Bundy: He’s going to have to give us something before the assurance [*unclear*].

President Kennedy: Well, except all he wants to agree to is one run of the . . .

Bundy: Yeah—

President Kennedy: Which isn’t really much good. I mean, those are three rather limited prices for him to pay, except maybe psychologically.

Bundy: Say them again. I’ll make sure I’ve got them straight.

President Kennedy: If he will take out the IL-28s, give us one U.N. run of the sites, which I don’t think is so important.

Bundy: No.

President Kennedy: But at least just fulfills the letter of the agreement. And will permit us, will accept the idea that we're going to do high-level reconnaissance—

Bundy: Well, at least not worry about it, not shoot them down.

President Kennedy: Yeah. High-level reconnaissance. He will get the no-invasion pledge plus the—

Bundy: Lifting of the quarantine.

President Kennedy: Quarantine lifted, plus an easing of relations in the Caribbean, plus a readiness to go on to the next negotiations. Now, it seems to me that as much as—what we've . . .

Bundy: Right.

President Kennedy: I agree the deal isn't done, but he can get the deal done by a rather cheap price. The missiles were a much more difficult problem.

Rusk: He's letting it now get to the point where it's going to be a second backdown for him. He should pick this up as a part of the first [*unclear*].

Thompson: [*Unclear.*]

Bundy: The point is that he has to get it through his head that this is going to get worse, not better.

President Kennedy: Bobby is going to see him tonight, is he?

Bundy: No, sir, I think we'd wait 24 hours.

President Kennedy: If we can get this one down. [*Unclear.*]

Rusk: Bob, you're sitting next to the Chancellor¹⁵ tonight.

McNamara: I know that.

Rusk: And he may want to talk to you about tactical nukes.¹⁶

McNamara: He and I aren't going to have a very pleasant dinner in that case.¹⁷ [*McNamara and Bundy laugh*].

¹⁵ Rusk is referring to the seating arrangements at that evening's White House dinner with West German Chancellor Konrad Adenauer.

¹⁶ The topic of NATO tactical nuclear weapons had come up twice during the day [see *FRUS*, 15:434].

Evelyn Lincoln: [*to the President*] Jackie wants to talk to you.

McNamara: What was his position today [*unclear*: on this]?¹⁸

One minute, thirty-seven seconds excised as classified information.

After the excision, McNamara offered Thompson a ride and the participants left the room. The recorder stayed on and picked up distant corridor conversation and general office noise. At one point Bundy and Sorensen engaged in a short conversation. After approximately five minutes, the recorder stopped.

At 8 P.M., Rusk hosted a stag dinner for Chancellor Adenauer and his party.

At 7:45 P.M. the following evening, Thursday, November 15, Ambassador Dobrynin called Robert Kennedy at which time the Attorney General delivered the President's message.¹⁹

¹⁷ Interestingly, Kennedy himself had suggested to Adenauer that he and McNamara might discuss the topic further over dinner that evening.

¹⁸ For the official summaries of the two substantive discussions between Kennedy and Adenauer during the day, see *FRUS*, 15:427-43.

¹⁹ For the text of the message as it was delivered, see *FRUS*, 11:460-62.